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DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 273 875 CG 019 339

AUTHOR Flynn, Margaret
TITLE Wisdom of Aging.
PUB DATE 83
NOTE 8p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Aging (Individuals); *Life Satisfaction; *Older Adults
IDENTIFIERS *Life Goals

ABSTRACT

Aging can be difficult for some, but for others it is a process in which problems and joys are encountered and faced through the life cycle. In this study, 50 older adults responded to an open-ended question. Respondents were asked to give advice to the young on their insights toward fulfillment of life goals. Responses were put into five categories. Responses in the first category dealt with setting definite goals, indicating the importance of establishing, working towards, and achieving these goals. The second category emphasized the need to believe in a Supreme Being or something other than one's self. The emotional, financial, social, and spiritual support provided by the family were discussed in the third category. The need to work up to one's potential and the value of education were emphasized in the fourth category. The fifth category included miscellaneous statements about patience, desires, and choices. Self-esteem, the need to reach out to others, and belief in God were important response themes. (Illustrative responses are included for each category.) ABL

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Wisdom of Aging

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Aging can be difficult for some, but for others it is a process in which problems, struggles, and joys are encountered and faced through the life cycle. It includes both the best of times and the worst of times. Each of us continues to grow and mature from early childhood to the advancing stages of life. As the colorful sunset beautifies the closing of a day, so the senior members of society radiate warmth, wisdom, and experience to the youth who are beginning the awakening of a new day. (John Baudhuin and Linda Hawks, 1983)

Henri Nouwen and Walter Gaffney in their book, Aging the Fulfillment of Life (1974), remind us that without older people we might forget that old age comes to all of us. The mature adults are like teachers who can show us that the circuit of life is not only a way to darkness but also a way to light.

This paper deals with advice from seasoned adults to the young. The writer submitted the following question to various groups of mature adults.

> If you had the opportunity to speak to young people, what thoughts based on experiences in your own life would you share, which may give insights toward fulfillment of their goals in life.

These senior members were asked to share their reflections of life based on their experiences with the youth of today. The survey was distributed among various adult groups. The groups included persons attending an Elderhostel program at St. Bonaventure University; persons served by the Cattaraugus County Department of Aging; the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany, New York; and others selected at random by the researcher.

Fifty people responded to the question. Some responses were extensive, while other responses consisted of only a few sentences. The responses were categorized by the writer. Five categories were identified:

1. Setting definite goals
2. Believing in something (Religion)
3. Importance of the Family
4. Working to potential (Education)
5. Miscellaneous

1. Setting definite goals

Under this category responses indicating the importance of establishing , working towards and achieving goals or aims were listed. Typical comments include:

1. aim for a productive life which comes from within.
2. accept yourself, face problems and realize life has many worthwhile benefits.
3. choose companions who can influence life productively.
4. avoid narcotics and alcohol, as they produce phony and unusual personalities.
5. be mentally and physically awake
6. be open to experiences of others and accept advice from those with expertise, who can challenge you to live and grow productively.
7. quote from Robert Browning " my business is not to remake myself but to make the absolute best of what God made."
8. college does not always make a meaningful life; learn a trade that can be useful to you.
9. follow your own value system and do not be swayed by others.
10. life does not come easy, work and study hard, if what you choose to be is important.
11. reputation and the moral code is far more important than material wealth.
12. know your own strengths and utilize them to improve society in proportion to abilities and opportunities.

2. Believing in something (Religion)

The need to believe in a Supreme Being or something other than one self was evidenced in this category.

Typical statements include:

1. become a practicing Christian who can influence through positive values.
2. include God in your core of friends, and stand up for what you believe to be honest, right, and true.
3. think critically of what you hear, read, and are taught.
4. be faithful to God, your country, and yourself.
5. be true to God's commandments, and your life will encompass sound decisions.
6. listen to God's word, through reading and living out the message.
7. peace of mind and happiness is an offshoot of God's love.
8. begin at an early age to have faith in God and in yourself.

3. Importance of Family Life

The emotional, the financial, the social and the spiritual support provided by the family were evidenced by statements in this area.

These comments include:

1. parents, pay attention to your children while they are young, and children listen to your parents and your life will be grounded in love.
2. remember your parents as they approach senior years, and be kind and patient to them.
3. do not hang on to your parents, if you have a handicap, you can make it alone with courage and perseverance.
4. cherish the close ties provided through family sharing and caring.
5. The American way was built on the relationship of family. Set your goals at being a good son or daughter.
6. teach the true meaning of death; physical life ends but there is the reward of life with God.

7. more parental guidance is needed for children; don't give them the adult responsibility of too much decision making.

4. Doing the best you can (Education)

The need to do one's best or work to one's potential as well as the value of education were reflected under this category.

Reprsentative comments follow:

1. education helps you cope with world problems.
2. study and get the necessary education to fulfill your dreams.
3. do your best, no matter what you are doing in life.
4. education is significant, but there must be awareness and dependence on God.
5. sports can be part of the educational process through playing or observing.
6. try to succeed in possessing a greater sensitivity to the rights, needs and feelings of others; then, education has been successful.
7. an education should incorporate acdemics, sports, music, drama, and lifelong friends.

5. Miscellaneous

In this category fall comments and concepts not easily classified.

Listed below are some of the statements:

1. work and do not always feel that retirement must come early in life.
2. patience is a virtue, so take the time to think things out before you make an important decision.
3. think about what you want from life; enter a career not primarily for the money, but for happiness and love of it.
4. choice comes in the life span; it can be full of life and giving, or it can be lifeless and loveless.

As can be seen from the comments above, the aged have much to offer the youth of today. It is interesting to note that traditional values, religion, family, and education are cited in the advice given by the old to the young.

A theme noticed by the writer is the emphasis placed on self esteem, or a good self worth. From this the respondents commented on the need to reach out toward family, friends, and society. This compiled with a belief in God seems to permeate many of the recommendations given to the young.

Aging is the process of life which no one can escape. However, it is the way one approaches aging that can help a person "grow old gracefully."

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